

Terms, mind-sets must be changed to encourage and enable more walking in cities

The time has come to acknowledge that walking will be an indispensable component of 21st-century transportation.

Today's plans for urban and suburban growth envision walkways as a vital part of multi-modal transportation networks. Walking is great exercise and beneficial to health. Unlike cars, buses, trams and trains, walking consumes no fossil-fuel energy and leaves no carbon footprint. Equally important, walking can be a positive aesthetic experience.

The term "transit-oriented development" (TOD) paints an incomplete picture of state-of-the-art planning and urban design. The terminology should change, along with our mind-set. We should talk about and advocate multi-modal-transportation-oriented development.

Changing attitudes about walking will be difficult in the face of America's long love affair with the automobile. Our addiction to driving and relatively cheap gasoline is powerful. And we have planned, zoned and built our metropolitan areas to facilitate vehicular travel while discouraging and often impeding pedestrian travel. Worse for pedestrians, many urban and suburban streets are unsafe and unsightly. Even if you are willing to walk a few blocks, the visual environment might be an aesthetic disincentive.

This is why the SRSOZ (tab 48a) is necessary.



How can we encourage and enable more walking? What will motivate people to change long-standing perceptions and deeply engrained behavior? **We must plan and develop -- or redevelop -- metropolitan environments so walking becomes safe, comfortable, enjoyable and stimulating.** This requires satisfying several design criteria:

-- Street patterns must be easily navigable and lattice-like, with blocks that are not too big and intersections that are not too far apart. Streets must be continuous and interconnected, providing motorists and pedestrians with more than one path for traveling to a destination.

The horizontal dimension is much more significant than the vertical. Thin, well-designed, tall buildings set among a variety of short buildings and appropriate open spaces enable the maximum number of people to enjoy functioning by walking.

-- Public streets must be artfully proportioned. Widths of sidewalks, planting strips, cart ways and medians are critical, as are the heights and setbacks of buildings flanking streets. Well-configured street spaces balance a sense of architectural definition and enclosure with desirable exposure to sky, sunlight, air movement and views.

-- To make walking truly pleasurable, streetscape quality and amenity are important. A **thoughtful mix** of shade trees and vegetation beautifies streetscapes and makes them ecologically greener. Good lighting and signage, convenient street furniture and attractive paving materials enhance a streetscape experience visually and functionally.

In urban areas, the architecture and public art should be the primary experience of place. Landscape architecture's job is to frame the picture and enhance the experience.

Life on earth does not depend on the urban street tree. The Amazon Rain Forest is a very different story.

-- It must be safe to walk, day or night. In addition to good lighting and durable walkway paving that doesn't trap high heels, streets need well-marked crosswalks and synchronized traffic-control signals. Police or other public safety officials should be seen regularly patrolling streets.

The SRSOZ State Rail Station Overlay Zone (see tab 48a on the Woodmont Triangle web page) provides funding to buy open space near cities to sustainably improve the environment and the quality of life by offering place-diversity in close proximity.

-- **Buildings facing public streets need lots of windows, entrance doorways and storefronts.** These benefit merchants looking for customers and pedestrians looking for merchandise. Because there is safety in numbers, streets lined by eateries with outdoor seating are even safer, not to mention livelier. People will walk along such streets because walking is delightful.

Look at cities such as New York, Boston, San Francisco, London, Paris and Barcelona. These cities have beautiful streets that encourage walking. Commuters in these cities happily walk 15 or 20 minutes from a subway or rail station, or from a parking garage, to their home, workplace or school. **They don't hesitate to walk a half-mile to visit their favorite shop, cafe or friend.**

In addition to changing terminology, we need to modify a pervasive American planning standard: the dogma of the one-quarter-mile walking radius. If you look at development plans, you'll see circles drawn around transportation nodes to show the presumed limits of how far Americans are willing to walk. The Washington Post reported recently that some Tysons Corner property owners have complained that, because of assumed walking distance standards symbolized by such circles, planned TOD density allocations around Tysons' four new Metro stations don't extend far enough. Their complaints might be justified.

A quarter-mile is 1,320 feet, walkable in about five to six minutes. That's twice the length of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, or the length of the Constitution Avenue frontage occupied by the east and west buildings of the National Gallery of Art. It's really not very far. If walking is pleasurable, Americans will gladly walk more than a quarter-mile and longer than five or six minutes.

Let's get rid of those misleading quarter-mile circles that fail to reflect what so many visionary plans aspire to create: urbane, aesthetically pleasing pedestrian environments. Double or even triple the assumed walkability distances wherever attractive sidewalk experiences exist.

Instead of circles, delineate paths of sidewalk travel within street-block networks to indicate reasonable walking ranges. And make sure pedestrians have plenty to look at along the way.

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*The SRSOZ State Rail Station Overlay Zone
(see tab 28a on the Woodmont Triangle web page)
replaces these arbitrary and wrong lines
with a performance standard: attractiveness and functionality.*

*And it empowers local government
to act as the "master developer"
responsible for the public realm and building design review.*

Walking distance from rail is NOT a number — please see tab 28a on the Woodmont Triangle web page. The more attractive the walk, and the more errands you complete and delights you experience ("functionality") the longer you are willing to walk.

And, walking more is not a waste of time, it is good for you!

*Walking more doesn't just improve public health
(obesity is our #1 problem — read the last sentence on page 1 of tab 29a on the Woodmont Triangle web page)*

- it saves lives (cars kill and injure people and they pollute the air and water)*
- it saves money (our medical care costs are not sustainable)*

*see Centers for Disease Control website
www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces*